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GENERAL KENNEY AS A STRATEGIC LEADER

by

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Abstract

General George C. Kenney was the Allied Air Commander in the Southwest Pacific Theater during World War Two. As commander of Fifth Air Force, General Kenney reported to General MacArthur, and operated as the Joint Force Air Combat Commander. General Kenney gained command of Fifth Air Force in July 1942, inheriting a demoralized and beaten force with few resources with which to work in a theater designated as the lowest priority of the war effort. Yet, General Kenney managed to return his troops to the offensive, retain the initiative, and ultimately lead the allied air forces to victory over Japan.

The paper analyzes General Kenney's strategic leadership style, framed within the six strategic leadership tasks defined in the Army's draft FM 22-1-3. These tasks are: provide vision; shape culture; manage joint, combined, and interagency relationships; manage national-level relationships; represent the organization; and, manage change. The paper concludes that General Kenney demonstrated all the strategic leadership tasks and his experiences are relevant to learning about leadership today.

Chapter 1

Introduction

General George C. Kenney became one of America's most successful World War II air commanders. He achieved this feat by surmounting great obstacles. First, General Kenney's commander was General MacArthur, who fired the previous air commander and "... was disgusted with the unaggressiveness and disharmony manifest in the leadership of the American-Australian air organization in the Southwest Pacific Area."¹ Second, General Kenney came to a theater receiving the lowest priority for personnel and resources behind Europe and North Africa.² Third, the air crews' morale was low because they faced great peril. Should they be shot down, they found themselves with the unwanted alternatives of landing in water where they could drown at sea; land in a jungle rife with snakes and fever; or, face capture by the Japanese which often resulted in execution. Finally, General Kenney inherited a force of 517 aircraft of all types, only one-third of which were operational.³ Less than a 50 of his 245 fighters were combat ready.⁴ Yet General Kenney's vast air power experience, knowledge of tactics, and, most importantly, leadership style allowed him to overcome these obstacles and successfully lead the air war in the Pacific.

This paper analyzes General Kenney's strategic leadership style during his tenure in the Pacific Theater, from July 1942 to the end of the war. For this analysis, tactics,

strategies and the battles fought, topics most dwelled upon in the sources, are not discussed. Nor is this paper organized in chronological order. The framework for the leadership analysis is the six strategic leadership tasks outlined in chapter six of the draft FM 22-103, entitled "Strategic Leadership."⁵ These tasks are: provide vision; shape culture; manage joint, combined, and interagency relationships; manage national-level relationships; represent the organization; and, manage change. There is no attempt to equally balance each of these six tasks. Since he was a theater air commander, General Kenney most concentrated on shaping culture and managing change.

General Kenney's leadership style is relevant today. Organizationally, he was the Allied Air Commander with General MacArthur his "Theater CINC." Today this would be termed the Joint Force Air Combat Commander, or JFACC. Thus, General Horner, the JFACC during Operation Desert Storm, must have found many of the same leadership challenges that General Kenney encountered 50 years earlier.

Notes

¹James D. Clayton, *A Time of Giants: Politics of the American High Command in World War II* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987), 196-7.

²Herman S. Wolk, *Makers of the United States Air Force*, Edited by John L. Frisbee, (Washington DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1989), 134.

³Herman S., Wolk, *We Shall Return!*, MacArthur's Commanders and the Defeat of Japan, 1942-1945, Edited by William M. Leary, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 94-5.

⁴John Costello, *The Pacific War*, (New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, Inc., 1981), 319.

⁵FM 22-103, *Strategic Leadership*. Draft, Undated.

Chapter 2

Background

General George C. Kenney was born in Nova Scotia on August 6, 1889. He joined the Air Force in World War I, flew seventy-five combat missions and downed two German airplanes. Between the wars, he was primarily involved in aeronautical research and development. He ended 1939 as a lieutenant colonel commanding the Air Corps Experimental Division and Engineering School. He spent 1940 in France as a military observer. Then, in 1941, he was promoted directly to brigadier general and made commander of Fourth Air Force, a training unit in California.¹ It was from this position that Kenney received his promotion to major general and, in July 1942, was called by General H. H. Arnold for assignment to the Southwest Pacific.

General Kenney arrived in Australia in late July 1942. He was replacing Lieutenant General Brett, who was fired by General MacArthur. At this point, the war against Japan had been underway for over seven months. When the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941, the United States had only 526 combat aircraft stationed in the Pacific.² Within a few hours, Japanese attacks on Hawaii and the Philippines reduced this to 176 aircraft. During this phase of the war, the Japanese enjoyed a six to one aircraft advantage against the outmoded United States and Australian aircraft.³ In the succeeding months, the islands of Guam, Wake, the Philippines, Java and Malaya would fall. The

Japanese gained a foothold on the Solomons, invaded New Guinea and advanced over the Owen Stanley mountains toward Port Moresby, the last base owned by the allies. The Japanese intention was to take New Guinea and use it as a base of operations to invade Australia. This marked the farthest advance of the war for the Japanese and the darkest days for the Allies.

The nucleus of the Fifth Air Force, which General Kenney would establish on September 3, 1942, came from the defeated Far Eastern Air Force.⁴ The 19th Bombardment Group and collocated fighter units began the war in the Philippines and formed the bulk of American air forces in the eastern Pacific. After their devastating defeat in the Philippines, remnants of these units retreated through Java and ultimately landed in North Australia. From a force of 73 bombers, only 14 B-17s would reach Australia.⁵ Crews were worn out, the aircraft lacked spare parts, and morale was at a low ebb. This is not to say the air forces did not have some successes. One such success was the Battle of Coral Sea, where members of what would become Fifth Air Force participated from their bases in Australia. This battle, which took place on May 4-8, 1942, was the first sea battle conducted entirely from the air. As a major Japanese defeat, many historians would mark the Battle of Coral Sea as the turning point of the war.⁶ Still, this was but a single victory in a long line of defeats, and one of the challenges General Kenney would face was the image of the Japanese Air Forces as an undefeatable foe.

General Kenney found himself one of four air commanders in the Pacific. He was designated commander of American and Australian air forces within General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command. Major General Harmon commanded Army Air Forces under Admiral Nimitz in the Pacific Ocean Area. Brigadier Butler led Eleventh Air Force

in the North Pacific.⁷ Finally, the British General Wavell commanded the American, British, Dutch and Australian forces in India. While airman at the time understood the principle of unity of command, this organizational arrangement was reflective of the separate unified commands that existed in the Pacific at the time.

Thus, General Kenney found himself in charge of a demoralized and beaten organization, whose existing commander was fired by General MacArthur. The Japanese were close to taking all of New Guinea with intentions of invading Australia. It was into this situation that General Kenney would begin his leadership challenge.

Notes

¹Steve Birdsall, *Flying Buccaneers—The Illustrated Story of Kenney's Fifth Air Force*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 1-2.

²H. H. Arnold, *Report of the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces to the Secretary of War*, (Washington, D.C.: Army Air Force, January 4, 1944), 33.

³Vern Haugland, *The AAF Against Japan*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948), 1.

⁴United States Army Air Forces, *The 5th Over the Southwest Pacific*, (Los Angeles: AAF Publications, 1947), 2.

⁵H. H. Arnold, *Report*, 35.

⁶United States Army Air Forces, 5th, 2.

⁷Louis Morton, *Pacific Command—A Study in Inter service Relations*, (Colorado Springs, Co: United States Air Force Academy, 1961), 10-12.

Chapter 3

Provide Vision

FM 22-103 defines provide vision as the primary task of strategic leaders.¹ A commander must communicate consistent goals and priorities throughout the organization. Properly communicated and ingrained within the organization, these goals and priorities create a synergy where everyone knows their role in completing the mission and directing their energies. General Kenney did not put into words his leadership vision. However, his initial efforts to overcome organization and morale problems set the tone for the future of his organization. He did this by first winning the confidence of his superiors and achieving freedom to act without undue oversight. Second, he focused his people on the customer and aligned priorities accordingly.

Prior to leaving for the Pacific Theater in July 1942, General Kenney met with General Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, and General Arnold, Chief of the Air Corps, to get a sense of what he faced. Marshall stressed the sensitivities of the leaders in the Pacific Theater. Kenney contended that he “wanted authority to clean out the dead wood as I didn’t believe that much could be done to get moving with the collection of top officers that Brett had been given to work with.”² General Kenney also insisted on bringing people he knew would be effective combat leaders. In particular, he wanted Generals Whitehead and Walker immediately assigned under him. Both Marshall and

Arnold reluctantly agreed as long as MacArthur concurred.³ Thus, General Kenney received initial freedom of action in hiring and firing his personnel without hindrance from Washington. Now he would face his most crucial test, General MacArthur.

When General Kenney arrived in Australia, he met with General Brett, whom he was replacing. Brett told him he had seen MacArthur only a total of six times. In particular, General Sutherland, General MacArthur's Chief of Staff, consistently hindered his efforts to see MacArthur.⁴ General Kenney believed he could only be a successful leader with had direct access to his commander. His initial meeting with MacArthur set the tone for his future as the air commander.

After a lengthy oration on war in general and the Southwest Pacific war in particular, General MacArthur told Kenney that he wanted an air commander who would be loyal to him. Kenney, who grew restive and "madder than hell" as the lecture proceeded, got off the sofa and said to MacArthur: "General, I didn't ask to come out here. You asked for me. I think it's one of the smartest things you ever did, because I am the best goddamn air force commander in the world today." MacArthur started to say something, but Kenney kept right on talking. He said that his airmen would be loyal to MacArthur "because my gang is always loyal to me, and through me they will be loyal to you. You be loyal to me and my gang and make this fifty-fifty, or I'll be calling you from San Francisco and telling you that I have quit."

Kenney figured he would be on his way back to Washington the next day. "But the Old Man looked at me kind of funny. He walked over and put his arm around my shoulder and said, 'You know, George, I think you and I are going to get along with each other just fine.'"⁵

Next, General Kenney had to tackle General Sutherland. Sutherland was autocratic and extremely loyal to MacArthur, but tended to isolate his boss from subordinates. Sutherland disliked General Brett, and the antagonism between the two had further isolated the Allied Air Forces.⁶ He consistently impeded the Air Corps' attempts to plan and carry out air operations. More often than not, air orders were developed by General MacArthur's Army staff, often without input from the Air Corps planners. Shortly after Kenney's arrival, orders arrived from Sutherland a page and a half in length directing in great detail how to complete an air operation. Kenney put a stop to it. Kenney barged into Sutherland's office and used a pencil to put a dot on a large piece of blank paper. Pointing at the dot, he stated, "That is what you know about air power. The rest of the paper is what I know about it."⁷ He went further.

I told him that I was running the Air Force because I was the most competent airman in the Pacific and that, if that statement was not true, I recommended that he find someone that was more competent and put him in charge. I wanted those orders rescinded and from that time on I expected GHQ would simply give me the mission and leave it to me to cover the technical and tactical details in my own orders to my own subordinate units. . . . I asked him if he prescribed for the Navy what their cruising speed should be and what guns they would fire if they got into an engagement.⁸

Sutherland backed down, gave Kenney direct access to MacArthur, and the freedom to command air operations without outside interference.

Finally, Kenney established his vision for the troops. His initial inspections revealed a force with warped priorities, where filling out forms correctly was more important than sustaining the front. The prevailing attitude was that New Guinea was lost. Morale was at rock bottom. The support side, in particular, seemed more interested in its own

priorities and did not focus on the mission. Kenney's speech to one of his staffs was indicative of the vision he communicated to his troops.

The next morning I had Lincoln assemble his whole staff and tried to give them the picture of what we were up against in New Guinea. That was where the war was and it was not moving to Australia. Those youngsters up there were our customers and customers are always right. Our only excuse for living was to help them. The payoff would be Jap ships sunk and Jap planes shot down. As far as I was concerned, the ones accomplishing that job were going to get top priority on everything.⁹

Kenney created a vision where the focus was on the troops flying the missions. All aspects of his command, organization, supply, food, and medicine acted on this vision. Kenney had achieved the freedom to make his own decisions whether they be operational or personnel in nature. Next, he shaped the culture of those under his command to realize his vision.

Notes

¹FM 22-103, 6-2.

²George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports, A Personal History* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), 11.

³Wolk, *We Shall Return*, 92.

⁴Kenney, *Reports*, 28-30.

⁵Wolk, *Makers*, 136.

⁶Birdsall, *Flying Buccaneers*, 7-8.

⁷Costello, *Pacific War*, 319.

⁸Kenney, *Reports*, 52-3.

⁹*Ibid.*, 79-80.

Chapter 4

Shaping the Culture

FM 22-103 lists five tasks necessary for shaping the culture of an organization. These are:

- Ensuring organizational culture is built on values deemed essential by the strategic leadership.
- Ensuring stated values, as related to the strategic vision, are communicated throughout the organization and are internalized by its members.
- Building consensus within the organization to gain support for goals and objectives that support and implement the vision.
- Initiating structural changes and programs with distant completion dates that must be institutionalized to be achieved.
- Ensuring an organizational commitment to train other leaders by picking the right people for the right jobs.¹

Kenney worked hard to shape the culture of his command. He constantly traveled to where his people were, whether at the front line airdromes, or in Australian depots. There were five areas which exemplified his efforts to shape the culture of his command: General MacArthur, personnel/support, food, Bulova watches, and creating a competitive environment.

As Allied Air Commander, Kenney's vision of air power could not succeed unless his commander embraced it. General MacArthur was a ground war expert appointed as the "theater CINC." In Kenney's opinion, air power was only playing a bit part in the war effort. In fact, MacArthur viewed his air units as a, "rabble of boulevard shock troops

whose contribution to the war effort was practically nil.”² To become a vital member of the team, Kenney realized he must shape the culture of his commander. Selling air power would not be easy. As Kenney said of MacArthur, “As much as I respected MacArthur and liked him as a person, I’ve got to admit that he knew practically nothing at first about aviation. When I got out there, he didn’t even want to fly.”³ Kenney faced a dilemma. On one hand, he had won the independence to plan and conduct air operations. On the other hand, Kenney understood he must use this independence wisely if he hoped to shape the culture of his commander and gain the confidence of the ground forces. Kenney’s success in satisfying this dilemma was evidenced at a press conference MacArthur conducted in January 1943.

The General had finished his talk, when one of the correspondents said, “General, what is the Air Force doing today?” General MacArthur said, “Oh, I don’t know. Go ask General Kenney.” The newspaperman said, “General, do you mean to say you don’t know where the bombs are falling?” MacArthur turned to him, grinned, and said, “Of course, I know where they are falling. They are falling in the right place. Go ask George Kenney where it is.”⁴

Ultimately, MacArthur embraced Kenney’s air power culture. In 1944, an Australian said of MacArthur, “No general in the United States Army has been more fanatically air-minded than MacArthur . . . an evangelist for air power properly employed.”⁵

General Kenney expended great effort in cultivating his personnel. Although he relieved a total of five “deadwood” generals, and brought in many of his own people, he tried not to show favoritism. One example was Colonel Bill Benn, who had been General Kenney’s aide, and whom he had assigned to command the 63rd Squadron. Despite the success of Benn’s unit which “had sunk or damaged more Jap shipping during the past month than all the rest of the Air Force put together, without losing a man or an airplane,”

he was reluctant to give the impression of favoritism by presenting a decoration to Colonel Benn.⁶ After discussing the matter with General MacArthur, MacArthur decided to present the decoration rather than Kenney. Another example concerned his son, who, late in the war, was assigned to the Pacific as a pilot.

After all the trouble I had gone to keep him out of my command, I was now his commanding general, after all. I warned him that he would probably have to stay a second lieutenant until everyone else had been promoted as I couldn't allow any story to start that "the general's son was getting the breaks." Bill said it was all right with him. He understood.⁷

Thus, Kenney created an environment where he endeavored to reward effective subordinates without showing favoritism.

Kenney concentrated in the personnel area with decorations and promotions. During one of his field visits, his troops told him, "no one had received any decorations for months and then just one or two had been passed out."⁸ He asked MacArthur for, and received, authority to present all decorations up to the Distinguished Service Cross.⁹ When he visited front line areas, he would often line up the troops and present decorations on the spot. Additionally, promotions were an area where he found problems. He observed that "Everyone in Melbourne had gotten himself fixed up with as much rank as the job would allow. Up in New Guinea I noticed that squadrons were commanded by captains and lieutenants, whereas the jobs called for majors."¹⁰ He immediately concentrated on promoting those who demonstrated their leadership in combat. Although he didn't completely stop promotions in non-combat units, General Kenney made sure his combat troops were adequately compensated for their efforts.

Kenney even concerned himself with the food provided to his troops. On his first trip to New Guinea, he observed that the poor diet of canned "M&V" (canned meat and

vegetables) caused his troops to lose 30 pounds during their combat tour.¹¹ As Kenney reflected, "The American Kid wants fresh meat and gravy, once in a while. If he doesn't get it, especially when he knows there is plenty available, he goes stale and tires easily . . . and is soon prey to all the ills and diseases of the jungle country."¹² Even though not on the table of allowances, (He grumbled that the table of allowances were considered by the war department as "sacred and inviolate as the Constitution of the United States.")¹³ Kenney directed that refrigerators be provided to the combat units. The Army engineers would confiscate the unauthorized refrigerators when they reached the New Guinea ports, so he had the equipment air shipped directly to the air fields. When the Port Moresby base commander found out, he directed Brigadier General Whitehead, the air commander in New Guinea, to turn over the shipments to the base, suggesting he would send armed trucks if necessary. Kenney told Whitehead tongue in cheek to "arm his trucks, too, and offer to shoot it out." Kenney's comments to the base commander settled the issue.

I offered to haul for all the troops in New Guinea, ground as well as air. . . . However, in the meantime, I refused to argue about whether what I was doing was in accordance with their regulations or not. Those kids of mine had to be fed properly. They had not been fed properly and my doctors were beginning to get worried about scurvy. It was the job of the SOS (Service of Supply) to feed us properly, but if the SOS could not do it, I could and would.¹⁴

Ultimately, the food problem was resolved, the sick list was reduced, and morale increased as a result of the better rations for the troops.

Another area that paid dividends for Kenney was mementos for his crew chiefs. During one of General Kenney's trips to Washington, he met Arde Bulova, the owner of the watch company. Bulova offered to give Kenney one hundred watches for the pilots as they shot down Japanese airplanes. Kenney had a better idea:

I told him I would take the watches but I awarded decorations for air victories. I suggested that I award the watches to the hundred best ground-crew chiefs in the Fifth Air Force, the men who kept the airplanes in shape so that the combat crews could earn medals for shooting down Japs and sinking ships. He thought it was a fine idea.¹⁵

Again, General Kenney showed empathy to those troops behind the scenes, those responsible for mission essential jobs. Recognizing the troops was an important part of the culture he shaped within his command.

General Kenney performed many unconventional personnel actions. Once a Sergeant Moser faced him for disciplinary action. Kenney learned that, although Sergeant Moser had accumulated 1,300 hours as a private pilot, he was a top-turret gunner and not authorized to fly military aircraft. During a mission, he took over a B-25, replacing the injured copilot. He had since flown 14 combat missions, but was caught by inspectors. Instead of demoting the sergeant, Kenney had him evaluated by his lead test pilot. When the sergeant tested as a skilled pilot, Kenney applied to promote him to second lieutenant with pilot status. He then followed with a message directly to General Arnold asking for the appropriate waivers. Six weeks later he commissioned the NCO and sent him to combat duty.¹⁶ These actions were not lost on the troops, who respected him for going the unorthodox route to support them.

General Kenney also concerned himself with logistics. When he arrived in Guinea, only one-third of his aircraft operational. This was largely due to lack of spare parts and suitable places to repair aircraft. In fact, supply personnel purposely withheld spare parts from New Guinea because they believed the island would soon fall to the Japanese.¹⁷ It got worse! Kenney found the main supply depot located in southern Australia (Tocumwal), almost 2,000 miles from New Guinea. "The place was loaded with airplane

and engine parts, propellers, lumber, furniture, lighting fixtures, plumbing supplies-almost anything you could think of.”¹⁸ The primary effort at the depot appeared to be building infrastructure and maintaining the inventory of incoming parts. Filling requisitions was last priority, and incorrectly completed requisitions were returned for correction after taking a month for processing. Kenney said he didn’t believe it, “but the kids made me eat my words when they showed me a whole filing case of returned requisition forms.”¹⁹ General Kenney directed the entire depot, including the buildings, be immediately sent to northern Australia. Requisitions from the combat zone, he ordered, were the first priority, whether issued by telephone or through official channels. As he lectured the depot commander, “We could not sink Jap ships or shoot down Jap planes with papers and filing cabinets, and I was far more interested in getting the planes flying than in having a beautiful set of records.”²⁰ By moving his repair depots close to the front and streamlining parts delivery, Kenney’s troops were able to triple their sortie rates.²¹ This is but one example of Kenney’s constant theme that the only reason for his troops’ existence was supporting the combat zone.

Kenney also used competition to maintain esprit de corps. On the day the 49th Fighter Group shot down their first aircraft, the commander produced a magnum of brandy with the intent to open it after shooting down 500 aircraft. As Kenney noted, “They were not thinking about how it would taste. It had become a symbol of a goal that they were shooting for and which they were certain they would reach ahead of any other group.”²² Ultimately, the 49th Fighter Group opened the magnum at the close of the war, with 677 confirmed kills, more than any other group in the Pacific.²³ On another occasion, General Kenney met with Colonel Rickenbacker and some of his aircrews. Rickenbacker

stated he had shot down 26 aircraft in World War One. Kenney offered a case of scotch to the first pilot to break Rickenbacker's record. Colonel Rickenbacker then added, "Put me down for another case." As Kenney reported, "The next day the story was all over New Guinea."²⁴

Competition, however, was a double-edged sword. When the 90th Bomber Group set up a fake bordello with a sign stating, "43rd Bombardment Group," a 43rd B-17 flew over and fired 50 caliber incendiary ammunition into it. Kenney, "passed the word to both groups that, while I had seen nothing, heard nothing, and knew nothing, I did not expect anything of that kind would take place again."²⁵ He also admonished pilots for taking undue risks in attaining top score status and, "To take it easy, too, and not get in a race with anybody."²⁶ Thus, Kenney tried to balance between healthy competition among his units, while monitoring to make sure things did not get out of hand.

General Kenney expended much effort in shaping the culture of his command. He empowered his people, focused on the combat mission, and endeavored to maintain morale and peak fighting performance. His structural changes became institutionalized in the culture of his personnel and resulted in increased combat capability. Nevertheless, he also involved himself in relationships outside his organization.

Notes

¹FM 22-103, 6-3.

²Costello, *Pacific War*, 318-9.

³Clayton, *Giants*, 200.

⁴Kenney, *Reports*, 184.

⁵Clayton, *Giants*, 200.

⁶Kenney, *Reports*, 126.

⁷*Ibid.*, 417.

⁸*Ibid.*, 43.

Notes

- ⁹Ibid., 52.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 79.
- ¹¹Costello, Pacific War, 318.
- ¹²Kenney, Reports, 74.
- ¹³Ibid., 75.
- ¹⁴Ibid., 194.
- ¹⁵Ibid., 215.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 308–9.
- ¹⁷Wolk, Return, 95.
- ¹⁸Kenney, Reports, 77–8.
- ¹⁹Ibid., 43.
- ²⁰Ibid., 79.
- ²¹John Chamberlain and Major General Charles Willoughby, MacArthur , 1941–1951 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. 1954), 76.
- ²²Kenney, Reports, 81.
- ²³Ibid., 571.
- ²⁴Ibid., 154.
- ²⁵Ibid., 258.
- ²⁶Ibid., 346.

Chapter 5

Managing Joint, Combined and Interagency Relationships

This leadership category entails three tasks. First, a leader must bring about acceptance by all participating countries of goals and national objectives. Second, the leader creates consensus so combined actions can be taken consistent with the shared goals and objectives. Finally, the leader must organize the resource base necessary to achieve the joint objectives.¹ General Kenney developed and sustained the Australian coalition alliance and joint operations. Even though President Roosevelt divided the Pacific effort between the Navy, commanded by Admiral Nimitz, and the Army, commanded by General MacArthur, Kenney ultimately supported both task forces. As the Allied Air Forces Commander, his units represented the United States, as well as Australia, Holland, New Zealand, and even Mexico.² General Kenney strengthened these relationships by reorganizing his forces, demonstrated sensitivity to Australian concerns, and used industrial and governmental contacts to assist in accomplishing his mission.

When Kenney arrived in the theater, he found the organization was aligned in a directorate-type structure. This was a “scrambled outfit of Australians and Americans, with so many lines of responsibility, control, and coordination on the organizational chart that it resembled a can of worms as you looked at it.”³ At the same time, Kenney realized the standard air force organization was inflexible for his unique needs. As commander of

both American and Australian units, he was required to operate from Brisbane, over one thousand miles from the main operating base at Port Moresby. Because of the pressure of Japanese air attacks, all medium and heavy bombers were based in Australia and staged through Port Moresby. His quandary was how to command his units so far from the front.⁴ Kenney fixed it by separating the Americans and Australians into separate commands using a group and squadron alignment. On the American side, he created Fifth Air Force with separate fighter and bomber commands. He allowed the Australians to organize their command as they saw fit. He then made himself the commander of both Fifth Air Force and the Allied Air Forces. Then, he integrated the headquarters with members from both nations. He put Australians in charge of operations and intelligence, two critical positions, which demonstrated his commitment to the allied cause. To solve the Brisbane-Port Moresby problem, he created an "advanced echelon" at Port Moresby. Commanded by Brigadier General Whitehead, this small "advon" headquarters concentrated on control of aircraft operations. The Brisbane headquarters provided the administrative support and general directives to assure the air corps operated in concert with the ground and naval forces.⁵ Thus, Kenney created an organization with direct lines of control and responsibility, and effectively used the military from both countries. As the war progressed, Kenney created additional "advon" headquarters on islands as they were captured and made ready for aircraft operations. Kenney successfully used these organizational concepts the through out the rest of the war.

General Kenney went to great lengths to retain a positive relationship with the Australian forces. As he observed, "the Australians seemed a little more than worried about being pushed aside by the American as soon as our forces and equipment would

arrive in sufficient quantities to start offensive action.”⁶ He, “promptly assured all the RAAF crowd that I was not going to be pro anything but Air Force and that I would fight to get airplanes, engines, and spare parts for both the Americans and the Aussies. I wanted aviators, regardless of nationality, who could fly, shoot down Japs, and sink Jap ships.”⁷

On one occasion, American-Australian relations became frayed when two Australian A-20s dropped bombs at some American naval barges. Fortunately, they missed. General Kenney went to the offending squadron and talked to the officers:

I told them that Australians should not bomb American barges any more than American pilots should bomb Australian boats. These international incidents caused bad feelings and were not good. . . . However, I explained that what pained me more than anything else was the fact that they had missed the boat with all their bombs . . . a few eyes began to twinkle here and there and I knew that the Aussie sense of humor had got the idea.⁸

General Kenney understood that the war in the Pacific could only be won with the combined efforts of all the allied forces, and worked to keep them fighting together.

General Kenney used contacts from outside his organization. He worked closely with Bill Knudsen, a former president of General Motors. Mr. Knudsen, whose title was Director of War Production for the War Department, was responsible for speeding up wartime production. Kenney found Mr. Knudsen invaluable in expediting the flow of critical spare parts to his theater.⁹ Later in the war, Knudsen, at this point an Army Lieutenant General, would be responsible for keeping the P-38 aircraft production line operating. This twin engine fighter was the primary long-range pursuit aircraft for the Pacific theater. In Europe, however, the P-38 was considered inferior against German

opponents. Many in Washington wanted to end the production of the P-38. However, Kenney and Whitehead argued for more P-38s:

Whitey and I took turns for over an hour explaining that the P-38, with two engines and the capability of flying on one, and with the greater range than any other fighter we had, was the ideal airplane for the long over-water and over-jungle operation of our theater. We reminded him that if a pilot went down over Europe the worst that could happen was that he would be taken prisoner, with an excellent change of living though the war. In the South West Pacific Area, however, landing in the ocean or in the jungle were both extremely hazardous, with little chance of survival, and if a pilot was taken prisoner by the Jap, torture and death were almost certain.¹⁰

General Knudsen became convinced, overturned objections in Washington, and continued delivering P-38s to the Pacific. As the above illustration demonstrates, General Kenney's contacts with those outside the Pacific Theater were critical to communicating the theater's unique operating requirements.

Another important contact was Australian Air Minister Drakeford. During the critical days of 1942, Kenney desperately needed to air supply troops to the far side of New Guinea. He appealed to Air Minister Drakeford, who came through by activating 11 Australian Airlines and 15 military training aircraft to the cause. These aircraft provided sufficient capacity to supply the troops and the operation proved successful.¹¹

Kenney was a strategic leader who created shared goals and then achieved the consensus necessary to reach his objectives. Through his streamlined organization, he created a combined organization that effectively used the military from multiple countries. Kenney kept the Australian forces a valuable part of the team. He used contacts with outside agents to create a resource base that proved essential in accomplishing his mission. Together, these actions demonstrated his ability to manage joint, combined and interagency relationships.

Notes

¹FM 22-103, 6-4.

²Clayton, *Giants*, 198.

³Kenney, *Reports*, 41.

⁴Birdsall, *Flying Buccaneers*, 15.

⁵*Ibid.*, 16.

⁶Kenney, *Reports*, 49.

⁷*Ibid.*, 50.

⁸*Ibid.*, 166.

⁹*Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 285.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 163.

Chapter 6

Managing National-Level Relationships and Representing the Organization

Because General Kenney operated at the theater level, these two tasks become blurred and thus are combined for this analysis. Managing national-level relationships include participating in national policy formulation, interpreting national policy as it relates to an organization's mission, implementing national policy in joint, combined arena, and defending the organization's needs for resources.¹ Representing the organization involves interacting with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches; acting as spokesperson for with the media, other agencies, influential people and the public; and, networking to influence the environment.²

General Kenney often became involved in managing national-level relationships. On several occasions General MacArthur trusted Kenney to represent him in meetings in Hawaii and Washington. These appearances demonstrated Kenney's understanding of the relationship between his organization, the war in the Pacific, and the overall American frame of reference. He saw his role as advising Washington on national strategy formulation and representing MacArthur's requirements for resources.

Kenney made three trips to Washington. He advised Marshall and Arnold on strategy for winning the Pacific War. He also argued for more airplanes. For example, in the three

months subsequent to January 1943, Kenney had lost 146 aircraft while only receiving 89 replacements.³ During this same three-month period, the United States produced over 10,000 aircraft, the vast majority going to the European Theater.⁴ As he remarked, "I warned them that if they didn't keep me going, we would be run out of New Guinea. . . . I told Arnold I was not that particular. All I wanted was something that would fly."⁵ Still, he knew his chain of command and did not want to undercut General Arnold's authority. When Assistant Secretary of War Patterson offered to take Kenney's request for more aircraft directly to President Roosevelt, Kenney, "asked him not to as I don't want to go over Arnold's head unless I can't get anything any other way."⁶ Kenney privately met with President Roosevelt where he discussed the past battles and future strategy. He, "found the President surprisingly familiar with the geography of the Pacific, which made it quite easy to talk with him about the war out there."⁷

During one of his visits to Washington in January 1944, General Kenney met with Generals Marshall and Eisenhower. "Ike" had come to Washington secretly and wanted advise on how Kenney had achieved air superiority prior their island offensives. It seemed the Ike and General Spaatz were looking for tactics to use prior to the invasion of France. Kenney briefed General Eisenhower on the tactics he found most successful. He did, nevertheless, provide a caution:

I suggested, however, that the two wars were entirely different and being fought against opponents who were also quite different in their methods, their military intelligence and capacity, and their psychology. I therefore could not presume to tell either Eisenhower or Spaatz how to fight their war.⁸

General Eisenhower asked Kenney if he could spare any of his experts to advise them in their effort. Kenney sent Brigadier General Frederick Smith, one of his combat leaders, to Europe for six months.

During each of these meetings, he represented his organization with an in-depth understanding of its relationship to overall strategy. Kenney saw one of his key responsibilities to act as spokesperson for the Pacific war. He had the ability to persuade his leadership of the importance of providing resources to the Pacific, yet was able to compromise when necessary.

Notes

¹FM 22.103. 6–7.

²Ibid., 6–8.

³Kenney, Reports, 185.

⁴Irving Holley, Jr., *Buying Aircraft: Materiel Procurement for the Army Air Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1964), 550.

⁵Kenney, Reports, 214.

⁶Wolk, Return, 102.

⁷Kenney, Reports, 215.

⁸Ibid., 344.

Chapter 7

Managing Change

Managing Change is heavily influenced by the two strategic leadership categories, providing vision, and shaping culture. Change is generated from external factors, such as the threat, resources provided, and national policies. Likewise, change is also internally driven through doctrine, equipment modernization, positioning forces, and organizing units.¹ General Kenney was probably best known for his ability to manage change. The historian Herman Wolk referred to Kenney as “The Great Innovator.”² A few of the areas Kenney distinguished himself were combat airlift, parachute bombardment, air drops in zero visibility, and using captured Japanese bombs. A vital part of Kenney’s vision was to generate the need for change within the organization. In doing this, he improved equipment and modified doctrine to take full advantage of the changes. Three examples are discussed here: obtaining spare parts, air transporting trucks in the DC-3, and modifying the B-25 as a “Commerce-Destroyer.”

Early in his tenure, Kenney’s units were critically short of spare parts. Once a B-17 lost three engines and emergency landed on a “carpet sized strip of sand.” Rather than abandon the aircraft, Kenney had mechanics repair the engines, and empty it of all excess weight. Then, by putting down 1,000 feet of steel matting on the beach, they were able to get it airborne and eventually back into service. On another occasion, a B-25 crash-landed

near a rough landing strip, in a Japanese-controlled part of New Guinea. A DC-3 to dropped a four-man crew into the area to cannibalize the aircraft. Four days later, the crew and one hundred natives met the DC-3 with the desperately needed parts from the B-25 as well as parts from a fighter plane they had found nearby.³

One of the tactics successfully used during the Pacific war was to create new air fields using only airlift to deliver the needed men and supplies. A major problem with this approach was that trucks were needed to move material for the landing strips. With no roads into the airfield, how could the needed trucks be delivered? Kenney's troops ingeniously solved this problem. They cut the frames of the trucks in half, delivered each half to the new airstrip in a DC-3, and then welded the trucks back together. When MacArthur found out about this he remarked at a press conference that, "he believed that if he told me (Kenney) to move New York to the West Coast and reerect it there, the Fifth Air Force would figure out a way to do it."⁴

Kenney also demonstrated his leadership by creating the B-25 Commerce-Destroyer. Kenney recognized the need for improving strafing capability against Japanese shipping which was being used to supply their ground troops. He directed his chief "trouble shooter," Major Pappy Gunn, to pull the bombardier section out of the front end of a B-25, fill it with 50 caliber machine guns, and strap as many other guns on the sides and wings of the airplane as possible. Ultimately, Major Gunn developed a configuration using seven machine guns. Next, Kenney had to convince his pilots to operate the modified aircraft. He started with Captain Lerner, a young pilot in his command.

I made him a major and put him in command of the 90th Squadron . . . I told Lerner I wanted him to sell the airplane and the strafing tactics to his squadron. I wanted him to like the plane, make his squadron like it, . . . I

promised that if he sank that convoy I'd change the name of the Solomon Sea to Lerner's Lake. The rascal grinned and said, 'General, she's in the bag.'"⁵

Kenney then sent plans to General Arnold for North American, the B-25 manufacturer, to build the Commerce Destroyers. However, on one of Kenney's trips to Washington, "a battery of engineering experts . . . explained to me that the idea was impracticable. They tried to prove to me that the balance would be all messed up."⁶ Kenney then revealed the ace up his sleeve.

I listened for a while and then mentioned that twelve B-25s fixed up in this manner had played a rather important part in the Battle of the Bismark Sea and that I was remodeling sixty more B-25s right now at Townsville. Arnold glared at his engineering experts and practically ran them out of the office.⁷

General Kenney also managed change by looking for ways to overcome current problems and focusing on the future. He empowered his subordinates to implement the changes. Given the peculiarities of the war in the Pacific, the vast distances and island hopping, Kenney devised new ways of doing business to meet these challenges.

Notes

¹FM 22-103, 6-11,12.

²Wolk, Makers, 127.

³Kenney, Reports, 71-2.

⁴Ibid., 270.

⁵Ibid., 173-4.

⁶Ibid., 214.

⁷Ibid., 214.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

General Kenney was an air power pioneer and strategic leader. He created a vision that focused on the combat forces. Kenney then shaped the culture of his organization that allowed him to gain the confidence of MacArthur and become an important partner with the sea and ground forces. Kenney also understood national-level strategy and was able to successfully manage unified, joint, combined, and interagency relationships. As a representative of the Pacific command, Kenney managed relationships by providing advice and counsel to national leaders. Finally, Kenney represented his organization and managed change to make his organization an integral partner in the Allied war effort.

General MacArthur put it best when he wrote:

Of all the brilliant air commanders of the war, none surpassed him (General Kenney) in those three great essentials of combat leadership: aggressive vision, mastery of air tactics and strategy, and the ability to exact the maximum in fighting qualities from both men and equipment. Through his extraordinary capacity to improvise and improve, he took a substandard force and welded it into a weapon so deadly as to take command of the air whenever it engaged the enemy, even against apparent odds.¹

General Kenney certainly did not win the Pacific war single-handedly. He surrounded himself with talented warriors who deserve much of the credit. Most importantly though, General Kenney leadership style created an environment where those under him could succeed. This ability was probably best exemplified during the dark days of 1942 when

the Japanese were threatening ground forces in New Guinea. The 63rd Bomber Squadron had been in constant combat and, on this day, could only muster five operational aircraft.

Bill Benn said, "General, this is a tired gang." I said, "Bill, there are 20,000 American and Australian troops over there in trouble. If the Japs land another fresh batch of troops, they may lick us. In any event it will cost a lot of lives to take care of those extra Japs. You have fifty Americans aboard those B-17s. There are at least 10,000 Americans over there depending on us. I don't want to lose one of those kids any more than you do, but if we have to lose someone to save those other 10,000 we will have to do it, that's all."

The whole gang was standing around listening. Before I could say anything more or Bill could reply, we heard some sergeant back there in the dark say, "Come on, what the hell are we waiting for? Let's put a load of bombs aboard and get going. There's 10,000 Yanks over there we gotta look after."²

Notes

¹Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 157.

²Kenney, *Reports*, 156.